Following her activist streak led Thunberg to 'good place'; Father says he opposed her efforts, then saw how it relieved her depression

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Greta Thunberg's dad didn't support her intense commitment to climate activism early on, but that changed when he saw it reverse her crippling depression.

In a revealing interview with BBC Radio 4, Svante Thunberg said his daughter, 16, struggled with depression for years, stopped going to school and was barely eating or talking before finding her voice amid the global climate crisis.

The Swedish Nobel Prize nominee has since transformed and become "very happy" as a result of her high-profile campaign, he said. "She dances around, she laughs a lot, we have a lot of fun, and she's in a very good place."

"You think she's not ordinary now because she's special, and she's very famous, and all these things. But to me she's now an ordinary child. She can do all the things like other people can," he said.

The doting dad said that during his daughter's darkest period, she was "basically home for a year," couldn't speak with anyone outside her immediately family members and was barely eating, especially in public.

It was "the ultimate nightmare as a parent," he told BBC Radio 4. He and his wife, the opera singer Malena Ernman, essentially stopped working to care for the struggling child at their home in Sweden.

So when Greta, previously diagnosed with Asperger's, a form of autism, said she wanted to embark on public protests to raise awareness about climate change, her parents responded "quite clearly" that they "would not support it," he said.

"Obviously, we thought it was a bad idea, putting yourself out there with all the hate on social media. You know, just the idea of your own daughter putting herself at the very front line of such a huge question like climate change," he explained.

Undeterred, the teen staged her first sit-in outside the Swedish parliament. Soon she was answering questions from curious onlookers and journalists and even ate a vegan Pad Thai meal. "I cannot explain what a change that meant to her and to us," her dad said. "She could do things she could not have done before."

He scoffed at claims he and his wife pushed Greta onto the international stage.

"On the contrary. I mean, we said, 'OK, if you're going to do it, you're going to have to do it by yourself. You're going to have to be incredibly well prepared. You have to have all the answers to all the questions,' " he said.

"We are not climate activists. We never were," he said. "She basically thought we were huge hypocrites."

Thunberg said he eventually "ran out of arguments" to push back on Greta's calls for action.

The family ultimately stopped flying on airplanes, and he became a vegan.

"I did all these things. I knew they were the right thing to do ... but I didn't do it to save the climate. I did it to save my child," Thunberg told the BBC.

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